

Regional Strategic Plan 2009–2012

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Vice Chancellor's Introduction

Universities are unique institutions because they can make connections between regions and local communities and the globalized world in which they are embedded. Higher education and research are critical contributors to the economic, social and cultural development of regional communities in the 21st century.

La Trobe University has a long and distinguished history in regional Victoria. Almost a quarter of our students are enrolled in regional programs. The University Strategic Plan makes it clear we are committed to providing opportunities for students to become well rounded citizens as well as professionals in northern Victoria as well as metropolitan Melbourne, and that we value responsibility, relevance, critical inquiry, participation and excellence in all our endeavours.

There are significant opportunities for increasing participation in higher education in regional Victoria. Participation rates remain unacceptably low. This limits opportunities for individuals and communities. Universities can and should contribute greatly to the development of vibrant and innovative regional communities.

La Trobe intends to make a greater contribution to the social, economic, cultural and environmental outcomes for regional communities. The university cannot do this on its own. Strong partnerships between La Trobe and regional communities are the keystone of our regional strategy. We are committed to working jointly with local governments, employers, schools and TAFEs, and with the State and Commonwealth Governments.

I encourage all those interested in La Trobe's contribution to higher education and research in regional communities to read this strategic plan and find ways of contributing to its implementation.

Professor Paul Johnson
Vice Chancellor and President

Statement of purpose

La Trobe University will promote critical inquiry, advance and share knowledge, and support the practical application of knowledge for the benefit of all in northern Victoria.

La Trobe University is committed to contributing to the development of vibrant and sustainable communities in regional Victoria through education, research, and community engagement. This Regional Strategic Plan provides a pathway for La Trobe University to follow over the next four years in northern Victoria. It follows, and complements, the University's Strategic Plan for 2008-2012 (www.latrobe.edu.au/about/vision), which identifies the defining attributes and core values of the organisation. The Regional Strategic Plan outlines how the University will meet its goals of producing high quality graduates and high quality research within a regional context. The Plan also provides a path for greater University engagement with, and contribution to, the regional communities which we serve.

La Trobe's Commitment to Regional Communities

For La Trobe, engaging our communities in mutually supportive endeavour is inseparable from our core activities of teaching, learning and research.

With seven campuses, the communities to which we most strongly relate are based in the northern Melbourne metropolitan region and northern Victoria. We will interact with and contribute to these communities through teaching and research which is designed to enrich and develop their economic, professional, social and cultural fabric. We will use our network of campuses to provide educational opportunities that are inclusive; encouraging participation of a diverse range of students, particularly Indigenous, low SES, rural and isolated students. We will draw on the relaxed, friendly and caring environments of our regional campuses to provide a unique student experience.

During the planning period, in collaboration with these communities, the University will:

- Strengthen the organisational structure linking all campuses to build a strong sense of shared identity within the University.
- Identify courses that are sustainable and relevant, meeting community workforce, social and/or cultural needs.
- Consult with our communities to identify regional needs and aspirations especially through Community/Regional Advisory Boards.
- Create educational pathways for life-long learning in our communities through enabling programs, regional bonuses and enhanced relationships with local secondary and TAFE providers.
- Use our research strengths to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of environmental, economic and social transformations occurring in regional Australia.

To achieve these objectives the following actions will be undertaken:

By 2010 each Faculty will:

- i) Review and strengthen its suite of regional programs, including higher degree by research programs, to ensure they meet community needs whilst being financially sustainable.
- ii) Review and strengthen pathways for life-long learning through enabling programs, regional bonuses and enhanced relationships with local secondary and TAFE providers.
- iii) Identify research priorities and develop and support research programs that meet the research needs of regional communities and which align with LTU research strengths

By 2010 the University will:

- i) Appoint a Pro Vice Chancellor (Regional) to lead the regional and engagement function.
- ii) Establish cohesive organisational structures, policies and procedures to enable the development of regional teaching and research.
- iii) Review and strengthen consultative arrangements and communication with relevant stakeholders to ensure effective community engagement.
- iv) Incorporate a transparent regional budget stream in the University budget model.
- v) Ensure a financially sustainable regional capital development and infrastructure plan is developed to support teaching, research and student services (including accommodation) as

part of the University master plan and that this plan includes specific strategies to reduce significantly the University's carbon footprint and optimise water use.

- vi) Ensure that regional information and communication technology needs are met through the infrastructure and renewal program.
- vii) Develop and implement a regional marketing and promotion program to increase participation and market share.
- viii) Strengthen Regional Alumni Chapters on all campuses.

The following sections address the University's specific regional priorities in more detail. The University's core priorities are to produce high quality graduates; to produce high quality and high impact research; and to engage effectively with our communities. Our enabling priorities include staff; organisational structure; infrastructure; internationalisation; marketing and communications; and financial resources. For each of these priorities the University has identified major strategies and performance measurements by which its success can be realised and evaluated by 2012.

From this strategic plan will follow an operational plan, in which annual targets will be set and operational accountabilities outlined in greater detail. Individual campus plans will also follow this strategic plan, in which the particular challenges and opportunities of each campus are addressed. This strategic plan highlights the commonalities across northern Victoria, and focusses in particular on the University's aspiration to raise regional participation rates and expand its footprint. Within this framework, individual campuses will be encouraged to work with their Regional Advisory Boards, and other community and industry groups, to identify particular strategies to achieve the University's goals.

Core Priorities 2009-2012

Produce high quality graduates

Higher education is critical for the development of regional communities today. La Trobe intends to develop strong partnerships with regional communities, and the State and Federal Governments to develop sustainable higher education opportunities in regional Victoria. The University strategic plan indicates that La Trobe will:

- develop sustainable, high quality and relevant teaching programs;
- develop a new approach that will enrich the student experience and enhance employment and the skills required of active and engaged citizens; and
- promote equity of access to higher education.

More specifically in regional Victoria, La Trobe will:

- increase equity of access to university education by increasing the participation of rural and regional populations in higher education;
- develop a flexible and integrated set of regional pathways to university education;
- develop educational programs in partnership with regional communities to meet their social, economic, cultural and environmental needs.

Strategies

La Trobe will review curriculum, assessment and modes of teaching delivery to ensure that courses meet the needs and aspirations of regional students. The development of new and distinctive courses will be informed by regional needs analyses which will be conducted and regularly updated.

More common, interdisciplinary and flexible first years will be introduced across a range of degree programs to improve access and choice across campuses. Blended learning will be more widely utilised, and cross-Faculty curriculum and teaching will be increased.

Access will be improved by the introduction of a comprehensive regional bonus scheme to promote increased participation of school leavers living in designated regional areas.

A pathway program will be introduced for graduates and mature age students to take up university study.

A guaranteed university pathway scheme for nominated students studying in regional senior secondary schools and Technical and Further Education Colleges (TAFEs) will also be developed.

These pathways will form part of a comprehensive partnership arrangement with a network of TAFE colleges and schools in regional Victoria.

Regional campuses will place student learning at the centre of the University experience. Students will have input into program development through a transparent process of course feedback.

A comprehensive student enrichment and engagement program across regional campuses will be introduced.

A regional student scholarship, accommodation, employment and support scheme will be developed, and a graduate employment program with regional employers will also be established.

Performance measurement

La Trobe will know it has been successful in relation to teaching and learning on regional campuses if, by 2012:

- Overall student load for the University in regional Victoria has increased by 20% (900) to 5,500 EFTSL.
- Overall student satisfaction with course experience has increased by 10%.
- The percentage of students from DEEWR-identified equity groups has increased by 10%.
- VTAC/UAC preferences (1-3) have increased by 20%.
- Student retention on regional campuses exceeds 86%.
- The number of academic staff gaining promotion on the basis of the recognition and reward of their investment and achievement in curriculum, teaching and learning has increased by 15%.

Produce high quality and high impact research

The University Strategic Plan notes that research is fundamental to La Trobe's purpose as a higher education institution. Over the planning period the University will increase the volume, quality and input of research by:

- focussing on research strengths and potential strengths;
- increasing opportunities for staff to undertake research; and
- introducing cross-disciplinary approaches.

La Trobe is committed to contributing actively to the sustainable growth of its regions. Relevant applied research will be central to this role. The University has identified seven research strengths, including Agribioscience and the Environment; Health and Society; Human Society and Organisation; Human Behaviour and Thought; Human Communication; Studies of the Past; and Molecular Science. Many of these areas hold particular significance for northern Victoria, and will form the focus of increased cross-campus and interdisciplinary research. The University will also work with Regional Advisory Boards and other industry and community groups to identify research possibilities, to increase collaboration, and to ensure broad support and advocacy for regional research projects.

Strategies

La Trobe will develop research programs which meet the needs of regional communities and which align with identified research strengths such as agribioscience and the environment.

Expanded research initiatives will include work by the Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities; further collaboration with the Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre; and development of the John Richards Research Initiative into Aged Care in Rural and Regional Communities.

The University will provide appropriate support and infrastructure on regional campuses to enhance the research environment.

A regional research mentoring and support scheme will be established for regionally based academic staff to improve research productivity across regional campuses.

Opportunities for higher degree by research (HDR) enrolments on regional campuses will be developed and promoted to ensure an increase in HDR student numbers. This will include an increase in the number of scholarships for higher degree by research students.

The University will also recognise and reward PhD theses of outstanding quality and outstanding performance during research candidature, and recognise and reward outstanding supervision of higher degree by research students.

Performance measurement

La Trobe will know it has been successful in relation to research on regional campuses if, by 2012:

- Revenue from research grants and contracts has increased on regional campuses by 50%.
- The number of Higher Degree by Research students has increased by 20%.
- The weighted number of Higher Education Research Data Collection publications by staff on regional campuses has increased by 20%.
- There has been a demonstrable increase in cross-campus research across the regions.

Engage with regional communities

Universities can and should contribute greatly to the development of vibrant and innovative regions and communities. La Trobe will work in partnership with the regional communities it serves to strengthen the economy and society of northern Victoria.

Strategies

The University will develop and implement a community engagement strategy for all Faculties which will include opportunities for student work experience, research partnerships, voluntary work, and alumni involvement.

La Trobe will also work closely with governments at all levels, employers, TAFE and schools for each regional campus. This will include strong consultative relationships with regional bodies such as Regional Development Australia, Regional Development Victoria and local government coordination bodies.

Regional Advisory Boards in Mildura, Bendigo, Shepparton and Albury Wodonga will be strengthened.

An annual regional report will be provided for all regional stakeholders. The annual report will provide information about each campus, including: student and staff numbers; participation levels of DEEWR-identified equity groups; Course Experience Questionnaire data; information on internationalisation (international student numbers plus numbers of domestic LTU students studying overseas); a summary of public lectures and events held; alumni information; updates on infrastructure including environmental initiatives; and a summary of community partnerships and other engagement at local levels.

The University will introduce mechanisms to measure regional stakeholder satisfaction.

Performance measurements

In relation to regional provision, La Trobe will know it has been successful in relation to community engagement on regional campuses if, by 2012:

- Regional stakeholder satisfaction of University performance has increased by 10%.
- Revenue from regional partnerships for education and research has increased by 50%.
- Regional Alumni Chapters have been strengthened on all campuses.

Enabling priorities

The University Strategic Plan identifies the core priorities of the University as the production of high quality graduates, and of high quality, high impact research. All other activities have the important purpose of supporting, directly and indirectly, these core priorities. Enabling priorities include staff, organisation, infrastructure, internationalisation, marketing and communications, and financial resources.

Staff represent the most important resource of the University. Over the planning period the University will support and recruit quality staff, and aim to bolster the qualifications of academic staff. Career and promotion pathways will be developed for teaching-focused staff, and staff satisfaction levels will be measured and included in the planning process.

The **organisational structure** of the University is an important enabler of success throughout the regions. The University has appointed a Pro Vice-Chancellor (Regional) to lead and oversee regional operations. In collaboration with the Faculty Deans, the Pro Vice-Chancellor will coordinate a consistent and transparent approach to the leadership and management of regional teaching and research functions across all Faculties. This will include the creation of a Regional Coordination Committee, which will be a subcommittee of Academic Board with representation from Faculties and Campus administration.

An Executive Director (Educational Engagement) has also been appointed to strengthen the relationship between campuses and educational stakeholders such as schools, TAFEs, and ACFE. The effectiveness of the organisational structure will be regularly evaluated.

Infrastructure, including buildings and grounds, information and communication technologies (ICT), and student accommodation and support is essential to effective teaching and learning and research. A regional capital development and infrastructure plan will be framed to support core business, as part of the University master plan. This will include an increase in the provision of student accommodation, and initiatives to reduce the carbon footprint of the organisation.

Internationalisation is central to the University's mission of producing global citizens. The number of international students on regional campuses will increase substantially, expanding the multicultural diversity of our campuses and the communities they serve. This expansion will be driven by the development of distinctive and new courses and a more targeted marketing campaign. Opportunities for domestic students to study abroad and undertake exchange programs will also increase substantially, and curricula will be strengthened to educate all students for global citizenship. The University will also act as a good global citizen by participating in development or aid programs in areas of particular strength or capacity in the University.

Marketing and communications are central to the recruitment, retention and future loyalty of high quality students. The University will develop and implement a regional marketing and promotion program to increase participation and market share. This will include market research to segment student and partnership markets and a revised and targeted student recruitment strategy. In addition, regional alumni chapters will be strengthened and major alumni events will be held annually at each campus.

Financial resources need to be maximised to ensure the efficacy of regional operations. La Trobe will establish a transparent regional budget stream, enabling a clear regional budgeting and performance reporting and management framework. The University will establish a philanthropic funds development strategy, and create a La Trobe University Foundation, aligned with the existing Bendigo Tertiary Education Anniversary Foundation. La Trobe will work closely with governments at all levels and other industry partners to ensure adequate funding of regional operations.

Performance measurements

La Trobe will know it has been successful in relation to the enabling priorities on regional campuses if, by 2012:

- Staff satisfaction with the University on regional campuses has increased by 10%.
- An amount equivalent to 2% of the total annual salary expenditure on continuing and fixed term appointees is expended on the professional development of staff.
- Student accommodation places have increased to match increased enrolments.
- Video-conferencing and other ICTs are effectively used to support teaching and learning.
- The University's carbon footprint is measurably reduced.
- International load on regional campuses has increased by 50%.
- The number of domestic students undertaking an international study experience, as determined by the Australian University International Directors' Forum benchmark, has increased by 50%.
- The number of academic staff with an international visit as part of their Outside Studies Program has increased by 10%.
- Staff and student satisfaction with infrastructure provision on regional campuses has improved by 10%.
- There has been a clear increase in the University's market share in northern Victoria, and in adjacent states where applicable.
- The La Trobe University Foundation, and the Bendigo Tertiary Education Anniversary Foundation, have raised funds equivalent to our competitor universities.
- A transparent regional budget stream has been incorporated into the University budget model.